JUN 9 1974

Letter from Taizé

Preparing for the world-wide Council of Youth

THEOLOGICAL UNION 1962

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How often I hear words like these : "... in me there is no resonance of God that I can feel, everything is empty, perhaps when I pray there is nothing really but a projection of myself ?"

It may be that the person speaking in this way does not realise : the dividing line between doubt and faith, between emptiness and fulness is imprecise, as it is between fear and love.

But He, risen from the dead, seizes hold of us. Dazzling passing of the love of God, he flashes through each person in their night. Have our eyes opened to his passing ?

He makes us his own. He takes to himself all that disfigures man. He takes everything upon himself. That is his secret : to take upon himself all that is unbearable, to take the place of the man furthest removed from him, without ever fearing to lose face.

Let him make us his own, then already we are on the move. And he, risen, living, goes before us.

Only afterwards, sometimes long after, we realise : He passed by, He took hold of us, his superabundance was offered.

Roger, your brother

This Easter at Taizé

Someone has written : "The Easter meeting was a sign of the way for the Council of Youth itself to follow. It had the double dimension of the Old and the New Testaments : a burst of light overcoming darkness and death, and also an Exodus, the people of God setting out from the land of slavery in quest of the place where the promised liberation will be achieved."

And somebody else : "I remember Easter 1973, the tension as we waited for the announcement of new dimensions to explore, struggle and contemplation to become persons of communion. This year was different : I was not expecting there to be any very new perspectives so close to the opening of the Council itself. I was at Taizé to celebrate with others the passion and the resurrection, sharing our suffering and our hopes, in prayer and common worship... Now, at home, how to become signs of hope ?"

"Using simple gestures, the common prayer gave expression to the searching of our daily lives. Every service both a festival and a challenge : when do we try to ignore suffering and the cross ? Where in our lives, in our societies, are signs of resurrection to be found ?"

A girl from Africa : "Death and absence both entail painful separation, anguish, loneliness. And suddenly, when you dared not hope any longer, the miracle occurs, the Resurrection, you are overwhelmed by a flood of returning life, you savour the joy of being at one as you feel the great heart of the church beating to the rhythm of a single cry : Christ is risen ! *Kristu Asekwi !* Our heart is aflame within us as we talk together, each calling the other's name."

On Easter Day in the evening brother Roger, speaking to the 19,000 people gathered at Taizé, said amongst other things :

"One thing which can be plainly felt about the Council of Youth is that it will never be able to make do with half-commitments, but uniquely with young people who gradually work towards the commitment of their whole being.

Another thing which can be said : no proselytising, be it for the Council of Youth or for anything else that may exist. We are not struggling to free ourselves of hard, cold doctrinarian attitudes simply in order to slip into other ready-made systems, however attractive they may seem."

Then he made a few remarks about the rudimentary style of the accommodation at Taizé : *"In the last week I was presented with a very considerable cheque, connected to a prize awarded in the context of reconciliation amongst all believers, which I had never expected that I would ever receive. My reply was : no, this cheque will not be used for ourselves — not for the community of brothers, which has always earned its living without accepting any gift for itself, and not to help make people welcome at Taizé, that too must be self-financing. The money from that cheque will go to young people in the Third World and a small part to what is being done amongst the immigrant workers in Great Britain — Asian, African, West-Indian, and particularly the Pakistanis. Why this refusal, when things at Taizé are so rudimentary ? Because material ease always goes contrary to creativity, it breaks and destroys the process of really new creation. To create, the only way is by using poor means, at least within the Church which we dream of seeing poor."*

Finally, he spoke of Chili, *"Of course in other countries too people are suffering — this very morning I saw young people from countries where any attempt at meeting together is violently repressed. But the drama of Chili has branded with letters etched in our flesh. Here, it caused a*

kind of depression. It is true that from Taizé there was a possibility of intervening to save a life, that of Luis Corvalan, the general-secretary of the Chilean communist party. In doing this, as in other things, I was eager to remain a free agent.

Recently, two young Chilean exiles were here and they told me this message 'Here, you are asked to sow, always to sow, but never bother about the harvest'."

Four months before the opening of the Council of Youth, as a summing up of four years of preparation, a group of young people from every continent read this text on Easter evening ·

As soon as it was announced on Easter Day 1970, the Council of Youth began to root itself firmly in a living source : the risen Christ, quickening a festival in the innermost heart of man and leading us on an interior adventure. That festival has no sense if we keep it for ourselves. Therefore we also celebrate it in a struggle, the struggle of those who are oppressed or deprived of a voice, seeking liberation. Many of us are now ready to give their life so that man be no longer victim of man. But we are often powerless in the face of the oppressive structures of societies, the relationships of domination and subjection between peoples. In our struggle to make the world a place to live in, we realised that we had to begin by living against the stream, becoming signs of contradiction ourselves. At the same time, the Gospel incites us to be untiring seekers of communion in the midst of all that rends and separates man from man. In order to achieve this, struggle and contemplation have appeared as two attitudes which at first sight seemed to oppose one another but which are revealing themselves as lying one at the heart of the other. So we have advanced over four years. We have already been brought, alone and with others, to strong commitments, in the realms of prayer and the search for justice.

In the midst of many, greatly varied situations, we continue in our commitment, both in the struggle to have part in the striving of men and peoples who are oppressed, and in contemplation to seek the face of God. As a result

we become people of communion. According to the extent to which each one is committed in their own life-situations, a communion grows up between us all. And gradually this communion becomes a parable of the people of God.

In another four months the Council of Youth will begin. Without aiming at spectacular things, this adventure will be 'public' insofar as we shall attempt to share it with the whole 'people' of God : sustaining a rebirth of the people of God so that it be fully committed in struggle and contemplation, a people celebrating the risen Christ, a Church poor, devoid of means of power, a place of communion for all.

The Council of Youth will not be a bureaucratised movement. It will not be modelled on the customary structure of assemblies with their successions of votes, amendments, commissions, representativity. It will be like an ever-widening river, like a tissue growing ; the image in Asia could be that of a lotus blossoming.

The Council of Youth will be what we shall have become. It will not offer anybody ready-made solutions. It will open out a space of creativity. It will be borne along on each person's own commitments, wherever each has got to — one deeply committed, another just becoming aware : each attentive to the other. Together, over the different continents we shall be like a people on the move, communion in which will extend to include those who, without sharing our faith, bear a common hope. Little matter how many we are : very frequently even a tiny number of men and women, ready to risk their all, hoping against every hope, have been able to overturn the course of events.

In this last stage of preparation for the Council of Youth, everyone is called to answer by writing, before June 30, one question :

> Given what you have already discovered and lived in the preparation of the Council of Youth, which are the elements that you would want to see contained in the Council itself ?

Through Latin America

Margarita has just finished a long journey taking her through several Latin American countries :

One sentence you often hear in South America is : *"But we are already living the 1970 Easter announcement, without ever having heard it !"* And it may be pronounced by peasants, by young workers from the very poor city-quarters, by students or by professional people.

"To give one's life so that man be no longer victim of man ? — That sums up exactly what we are searching for" said one group of young workers who are now in prison for political reasons ; they describe themselves as 'socialists converging with christians'. *"Why 'converging' ?"* we ask : *"Because in the Gospels you find both love and a kind of detachment ; the two are vital for socialism. Already now, here in prison we are trying to put into practice sharing the little we have got, and refusing privileges. Sometimes we get annoyed with young students and all their big words. What matters most is to talk less and live more the model of society that we dream of seeing... Another thing that we like in the Easter announcement is its vision of the Church : a place of communion for everybody, open, ready to share with everyone. That is the Church we would like to believe in..."* It is quite an experience to be able to talk about the Council of Youth with political prisoners !

Then a meeting with a group of students at Caracas. There one said : *"Political struggle is often so wearing, we discover a kind of hollow forming within ourselves — a space that nothing can really fill. It is not a void... rather a need for silence to allow us to rediscover the sense of all that we are involved in living. It is not the same as thinking about realities, or the strategy we should be following. No, it is something else."* The theme 'struggle and contemplation to become people of communion' appeals to

them, but they begin to reflect : *"Do we know how to contemplate ? Or have we lost the ability ? Out in the rural areas it is different..."*

We had a chance of finding this out, visiting peasants in Argentina : *"Why does your bishop say that you are a people of contemplatives ?" "Perhaps because of the mountains... you are simply there, silent. We do not care much for talking..."*

On the high plateaux of Bolivia, certain groups have been working steadily for years, slowly and in depth, encouraging a revival of the originality inherent in the various Indian cultures there. Many, both young and older people, were reflecting on the possible forms of reconciliation between whites and indians in Bolivia : *"How to die to relationships which are, as ever, forms of domination and marginalisation ? So as to be born into a new situation where the majority, the People, will have its rightful place in society ? A genuine reconciliation can only occur if there are clear breaks, even pain..."*

Often one encounters rejection of the Church, revolt against what many feel to have been 'an alienating religious education' instead of an education in believing which leads into commitment in favour of mankind. Sometimes there are violent reactions ; but amongst the young christians a new attitude is increasingly appearing : *"Is not that Church also 'our' Church ? Full of faults, fear, cowardice... but also really striving for renewal, with bishops (not as many as we might like) trying to live their ministry more and more in a Gospel spirit, beginning amongst those who are poorest."*

A number of young Uruguayans reckoned that the Council of Youth in South America should, on one hand, act as a spur to a lot of groups tending to remain rather 'spiritual', bringing them down to earth and into commitments within human history, and that on the other hand it should help reawaken hope amongst the many who are

deeply involved but now worn out, too hurt to be able to see any hope, in human terms, of succeeding in their political struggles.

How shall we be able to express this very deep reality which so many of us here are already living out with our own People, so as to bring it into the universal quest which the Council of Youth all over the world is going to be ? How to explain to others our Gospel-rooted commitments when they are bound on this continent to lead by way of political action ? And how can we be attentive to what others have to say to us, as we strive to give each other courage by our common hope in the risen Christ, the Lord of history ?

Switzerland

Yves and a number of others took part in a recent Synod of the Catholic Church in Switzerland :

During the Council of Youth, we would like to live a reality of the Church. Having just had the opportunity of taking part in a national synod and seeing a church wanting to adopt a firm stand but not quite succeeding, I think that it is important to have all these contacts with every level of the Church, so that the Council of Youth does not just go its own way. We are thirsty for a Church which is poor, not subject to the political powers-that-be. The Church's main task is to live, day after day, the festival of Christ, to live his love in the midst of the community of men.

During the Council of Youth, we must express these things we want as clearly as we can, this will mean finding dynamic and meaningful signs ; but without ever excluding those who do not desire to follow exactly the same path. How to find a 'form' of Church capable of embracing all the different ways of expression so long as they all come from the same source, Christ ?

We must not create an exclusive group, neither must we come to a standstill for fear of perhaps taking a wrong turning — but throw ourselves eagerly along the way we are called to follow, even though that may provoke all kinds of reactions. Can our Church be strong enough, alive enough in its heart, loving enough to stand up to this rending ? If not, would it still be that body which gathers its members in the singleness of the Spirit ; capable then of admitting means of expression so varied that it is constantly open to whoever believes in God, and open too to those who have no belief ? A Church unifying all our energies in a common moving toward the Kingdom ?

But will the festival in us be strong enough to allow every question in the world to be tackled with serenity and love, so that each of us can stand up and commit himself according to the call received ?

Italy

I arrived here in Rome back in October ; to start with I lived in a community with five friends. After two months spent growing closer together, three of us rented a shack in one of the poorest parts of the city. It is a quarter full of large, dismal houses and between the blocks of houses sheds have sprung up everywhere, swarming over a little hill, or standing in corners apart. We are now living in one such shed.

The people living here have reacted to this very diversified state of affairs with great individualism : they all enclose themselves tightly in their flat or shack, in spite of the fact that almost all of both groups are poor. So strange to have this district that is partly proletarian and partly sub-proletarian without there being any clear division between the two categories.

How to give a voice to those left outside of everything ? Before deciding on a precise type of activity, we are taking time just to listen — listening so as to understand things, waiting for the people themselves to make suggestions, just allowing them to talk. The house is rarely empty ! A number of old people are now beginning to break out of the bands of individualism, coming to tell us about their lives ; a number of young people visit us, looking for something new, or for help with their studies and we go visiting certain families.

My two friends are priests. On Sundays and sometimes during the week we animate a mass, which offers a unique opportunity of exchanging with everyone about the Gospel, of giving back the right to speak in the Church to people who for centuries have done nothing but listen to priests. Even the men from the district around are now coming to speak at the mass ! Some families have invited us to come to celebrate mass in their homes on a weekday — allowing us to bring together the people living in the same block of housing, breaking through the individualism and distrust...

How also to give the quarter a collective voice ? Most of the streets are without lighting, many are not made-up. The whole zone is a ghetto, especially at night. One small, very politicised group has become conscious of this issue. It is up to us to spread the struggle to involve the whole population, or else the sub-proletariate is just going to be used once more to reinforce the power of a particular party. It is quite something to see a delegation from here arguing with someone from the city administration : people who were born here expressing themselves in public after 40 or 60 years of just waiting.

I have lived all this very intensively since I too am an immigrant here. I am learning Italian from the local people, who have opened my eyes ! During the day I work in a mathematics research centre, then in the evening I come back to our shed and the people here. In these circ-

umstances I inevitably become more and more aware of how excluded they are, how much enclosed in a ghetto. Living here, I discover how complete is the break between two worlds.

Most marking of all for me is to be able to live this in the context of Church — a protestant living with priests! So far I have not discovered any difficulty about this, rather it gives an added richness to all our searching as a community, in prayer, preparing the mass, sharing with one another.

Olivier

In India

Several brothers from Taizé are at present working in Calcutta amongst the dying, with Mother Teresa. One writes about their life there :

"This vast metropolis, the fourth city of the planet, is beginning to appal us a little less. Slowly each of us is finding his place. Our little adventure did not begin easily. Our first lodgings consisted of two rooms, then all four of us were in one room where the dust of the street covered everything in a flash while a tram line shook the floor we had to sleep on. At the moment we have three rooms, making it possible for us to live in a district otherwise completely bengali.

It is very easy to make contact with the young Indians in the street. Each morning I go to work at Kourah, a vast slum of half a milion people. All the sewers are open and often you have to paddle through the places where they have flooded over the narrow lanes. The people, very poor, have often come from other parts of India. It is a corner that has been forgotten about. I work either among lepers or among the dying. I have never before lived what I experience as I wash these skeletons or touch the feet of

these poorest of men. And as we celebrate the eucharist, bread which is life, life for the whole of man, it is full of the sense of the 'only thing necessary'. Shall I ever burn with desire for God unless I am surrounded by those who, day after day, bear the cross so visibly in their bodies? Easter is no chance event; the festival does not just happen. A communion with those I am surrounded by each day, often without doing anything 'important', drives towards it.

I keep in close touch with those preparing the Council of Youth. The economic situation is such that any move against the stream, any gift of oneself for others, is more and more complete folly. But here it is only folly which can have any impact."

Another brother, a doctor writes :

"Last week, an old man brought in in a state of indescribable starvation said, 'I am going to die; I am not afraid, but I would like to wear something beautiful before I die'. And he smiled. He will only survive a few days.

Whenever I lose a patient, two sensations arise, on certain days they take hold of me completely : a pure joy, that of having encountered a human person in a privileged relationship just a few moments before the final parting, a sort of rapid fulfilment, an inner liturgy; and the most complete discouragement, often revolt, because I can no longer grasp the sense of this relationship, I am once again a doctor faced with permanent failure."

The review *COMMUNION* will from now on be published in English. A specimen number with reflections around the theme "Struggle and contemplation to become men and women of communion" is available (send four international reply-coupons to *"Communion"*, 71460 Taizé-Community, France). *Communion* also appears in French, German and Italian.

Spain

From someone who works in the mines in Southern Spain :

Living with the poor, the oppressed, those suffering, I have heard such groans of the Spirit, and my commitment has found such an echo amongst them, that I have had to face up to ever greater demands. Prayer and political involvement are their two poles :

Prayer, *attitude of conversion, in silence or reading of biblical texts in order to meditate on them in a living confrontation with news, facts, the little events of daily reality. Prayer also as inner retreat, vital and mysterious synthesis in Christ, the Father, the Spirit, birth towards another reality located within immediate reality. And certainly not prayer as some magical way of having an effect on things ; nor as an escape out of our realities when they go beyond us and show us our own helplessness.*

Political involvement, *affirmed by life itself as a necessity — costly attitude of service to society and means of sharing with others the freely received love. Certainly not political action as a search for power, disguised as service of others ; that would simply mean having control, satisfying a frustrated love by dominating in revenge.*

In the society in which I live, concrete political involvement is necessary because most people remain indifferent, the puritanical stand well back, and even amongst the people many are suspicious about everything political.

In my reality, what ways are there of being a bearer of the festival of the risen Christ ? I see two : by love (the love of Christ for us) for the neigbour, the most oppressed ; by solidarity and commitment with the weakest. This demands that I side without delay with the political party of the weak (whatever its name) as well as with all the little old women, in black, confused, or the children — all trust and astonishment — within the local church community.

I see that we are in a society divided between exploiters and exploited, at every level of relationships, be it between individuals or between whole groups : the worker, as opposed to the technician or the head of a section ; the worker in his relationship with wife and children ; advertising and the shopper ; the organised political group and its dealings with the citizen not aware of those realities... So then I have to affirm a relationship of service, without words, be it in a worker's assembly when some seek revenge or power over others, or in the local Church amongst the small and weak. Both at work, with administrators or fellow-workers, and at home with the neighbours... And also in terms of information, since the official news-media are full of silences, of non-truths of half-truths.

For my fellow workers I am "a man without wife", for the prudent I am "taking a ridiculous path", and it is not my inconstant spirits, inclined to be pessimistic, which give me the festival of trust in joy. How could my hesitations ever inspire trust in someone, or how could my fears ever give me audacity for clandestine activity ? Yes, really, it is by the Word become life in Christ and in so far as I can continue to respond faithfully to that Word given, that I can advance in him and that those around me receive a hope not contained in words, hope above hope, joy above any euphoria and a courage above every fear.

The *Letter from Taizé*, like every other aspect of the preparation for the Council of Youth, is called to finance itself. At the moment it is not managing to do this... If you live far away and it is too difficult to send money abroad, we may be able to indicate an address in your country (Australia, S Africa...) to which you could send subscriptions.

For the U.S.A. contributions towards publication and postage to be sent to : « Letter from Taizé », 2150 Almaden Road-114, San José, Ca. 95125, U.S.A.

For the U.K. : c/o 23 Christie Street, Dunfermline, Fife, U.K.

MEETINGS AT TAIZÉ

Name :

First Name :

Address :

(with zip-code and country)

Profession : ..... Age : .....

Will take part in the week from Monday ..... to Sunday ..... Yes-No.

Will come for the Opening of the Council of Youth (30 August - 1 September) yes-no.

Has already taken part in a meeting at Taizé : Yes-No

Is bringing own tent : Yes-No.

Can be part of reflexion-groups in italian — german — french — english — spanish — portuguese — dutch.

Can undertake simultaneous translation from ..... into .....

Need .... more registration forms / Information material.

Registration to be sent to : MEETINGS, 71460 - Taizé-Community, France.

Please remember to write announcing your arrival! Then the work of welcoming and feeding you is much easier...

Letter N° 17

Quarterly — Community of Taizé (71460) France — Phone (85) 38.22.44.

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INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS AT TAIZÉ

Dates : every week, from Monday evening to Sunday midday, from July 1 until August 18, and from September 2 until November 3. *There will not be meetings from August 19 - 30,* these two weeks being taken up with the material preparations for the opening of the Council of Youth.

'Districts' : last summer, the desire was expressed for the forms of reflecting during the meetings to be deepened and varied more in function of the people present, their interests, their commitments in struggle and contemplation in their own situations — human, social, political. So by grouping people into 'districts' without very precise themes to start with, it is hoped that the reflecting will be more supple and more creative.

Silence : other people have asked for more silence. So each one will be able to chose, either the 'districts', or 'a whole week of silence', or a mixture of 'silence and work' in which there will be some shared reflecting about believing. More zones will be set aside for silence.

Age : between 18 and 29.
For those aged 15 - 17 : two meetings, May 18-19 ; June 22-23.

Accommodation : under tents, either your own or the big ones here. Bring all that you can in the way of air mattresses, blankets, you will need a sleeping-bag in any case. Bring your own tent if at all possible.

Costs : the entire financing of the preparation of the Council of Youth depends on each one contributing what they can ; there is no other source of income. The cost of a week here (food etc) is hard to express, since the same sum represents different things in a rich country and a poor one : each person contributes what they can — if possible something between 9 and 15 francs per day.

Opening of the Council of Youth : from August 30 until September 1.

The next *Letter from Taizé* will give full details about the opening.

Plan to arrive for the evening of August 30 : before then it will not be possible to welcome large numbers at Taizé.

How to prepare for it ? How to live with special intensity the last month before the opening of the Council ? This is up to the inventiveness of each group and individual. One idea is that the arrival at Taizé on August 30 should be preceded by several days of 'long march', either alone or as a group.